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ABSTRACT

This is the fifth and final paper of a symposium on the evaluation of juvenile diversion programs by the Claremont Graduate School Center for Applied Social Research. The first four papers deal with specific methodologies used to obtain information at each of four levels of evaluation: general project management, description of the intervention, assessment of client outcomes, and analysis of system-wide impact. This fifth paper provides an overview of how the specific methodologies fit into the framework of our overall evaluation plan. A key concept in the author's approach to evaluation is the use of multiple sources of information to address each major program issue (e.g., What is the impact of diversion programs on the juvenile justice system?). Thus, a number of data sources in addition to those described in the methodological papers were used, including archival sources, questionnaires, and interviews. This paper includes a discussion of these aspects of the evaluation effort, and focuses on relationships between various methodological approaches. Another topic discussed is the difficulty evaluators face in attempting simultaneously to fulfill responsibilities to diverse constituencies including clients, project staff, service providers, the community, and funding agencies and political bodies. (Author)

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OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION ISSUES AND METHODS

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(Presented at WPA, April 1978)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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So far the papers in this symposium have been addressed to particular methodologies that we have used in the course of our evaluations. I would like to talk about the factors that are involved in the decision to use the various techniques for data collection. Perhaps the obvious prcoedure would be to identify the goals of the program, settle on priorities, and then proceed to gather data to determine whether the goals have been attained. However, things are not so simple.

The first problem is that the evaluation effort has diverse constituencies, each with its own goals, and its own priorities on the issues to be evaluated. In particular, there are funding agencies, management boards, project staffs, clients, and the community at large, plus other agencies that may be affected by the program such as police departments, the probation department, and community agencies that provide services to youth. Now the intersts of all of these groups do not necessarily coincide, and in many instances there are areas of competition or antagonism. Each of these groups, except perhaps the clients and the community, are in a position to exert at least some political pressure, on each other and either directly or indirectly, on the evaluators as well. Any data that the evaluators report or conclusions that they draw will be interpreted by each group from its own point of view and for its own purposes. Thus, an evaluation report that includes data on the operation of a system and makes recommendations for change, is destined to be the focal point of political battles, and in any

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case is likely to be treated with suspicion in some quarters, and perhaps even be faced with a lack of cooperation.

I'd like to digress for a minute to talk about one other constituency of the evaluation effort in our operation, and that is our graduate students and our education and training program. Our evaluation team operates under the umbrella of a recently formed Center for Applied Social Research at Claremont Graduate School. One goal of the research center is to provide to graduate students the opportunity for a range of practical experiences in applying methods and theory from psychology to diverse settings. Students will ordinarily be part of a team headed by advanced graduate students under factulty direction. Students with limited experience start with routine jobs such as coding, but have the opportunity to move into supervisory roles as they gain experience. Several students have taken on specific aspects of the evaluation effort and are working on dissertations in conjunction with the evaluation. The advanced graduate students play a major role in designing research procedures, writing reports and proposals, and representing the evaluation team in the field. Thus the evaluation effort can provide a vehicle for training graduate students in evaluation methods and procedures, and thereby meet needs of a graduate program with an emphasis on Public Affairs Psychology.

As I mentioned earlier, the evaluation effort also must address the demands of a diverse constituency. We might look at some of these in more detail. First, there are the funding agencies which need information on which to base decisions for continuation of funding and for changing guidelines. They need to know whether their money is being well spent. In particular, has the program attained the goals stated in the proposal, and is

it operating in a reasonably cost-effective manner. A second group is the management boards who need information to guide policy-making; such as defining criteria for referral to the program, and to identify problem areas in the operation of the program.

A third group is the project staff who need information at a level of greater detail. They want to be able to document achievements of the program, monitor operations, and pinpoint problems at a very specific level. For example, how effective are individual service providers, how should clients be matched to service, should service be limited to, say, 10 hours or 15 hours? A program like juvenile diversion also has an impact on three other broad groups. The first of these are the various other agencies that deal with youth, such as the probation department, various agencies that provide youth services, and the schools. For the points of view of these agencies, the diversion program can be seen either as a threat or as a resource. Another interested group would be the general community, people who are affected by the behavior of juveniles in society. The last group, but hopefully not the least, would be the juveniles themselves and their families.

Obviously, an evaluator needs to set priorities among the issues to be addressed by the evaluation. The natural starting point would be the evaluation contract and the statement of goals in the proposal which was funded. However, it would not be a good procedure to adopt methodologies that have no flexibility to respond to changes in the program. For example, one of the major goals of the Orange County Regional Diversion Project when it was founded in 1976 was to eliminate pentration of status offenders into the Probation Department. However, on January 1, 1977 a state law (Assembly

Bill 3121) took effect, which severely limited the use of confinement for status offenders. Later on in the year, the presiding Juvenile Court Judge in Orange County issued an order that the Probation Department would no longer be allowed to accept any status offenders except chronic truants. Thus, a time series analysis of intake of status offenders to the Probation Department would show that one goal of the Diversion Program had been met in a most dramatic way--penetration of status offenders into the Probation Department had been eliminated in one year! Of course, the true issue had shifted to the question of what was now happening to youth who earlier would have been referred to Probation for status offenses, and how the diversion program could best serve them.

Another goal of the diversion program is to take youth who would be referred to the Probation Department because they had committed a penal offense, and instead 'divert' them into counseling or other youth service programs. A problem faced by the evaluators is to determine which juveniles would have gone into Probation if they had not been diverted, or at least form an estimate of that number. There is, of course, no way to provide a certain answer to the question of what would have happened. There is no single data source that is free from extraneous influences. The logic reminds me of the 'Sweet Sixteen" speaker system. Shortly after World War II the Japanese produced very cheap handmade speakers as a cottage industry. The speakers had all sorts of individual imperfections, and they sounded terrible. Some unsung hero had the ingenuity to put together a 4x4 matrix of these little speakers, thereby creating the 'Sweet Sixteen' speaker, which actually had quite good qualities.

In addition to developing alternate measures for the same question, we

have found it necessary to formulate alternate questions to address some general issues. Consider, for example the problem of measuring the impact of diversion services on juveniles. In the paper on evaluation of clinical process, Mike, Sheryl, and Jim have pointed out the limitations of recidivism rates as the sole outcome measure. We have found it useful to distinguish three groups of clients for which one should logically use different outcome measures. First, there are the true 'diversions' from law enforcement of juveniles who would otherwise have been sent to the Probation Department. A second group includes those who have violated the law, but would not have been sent to the Probation Department at this time. For these youth, referral to a diversion project is actually an effort to prevent further trouble with the law. For both of thse groups, recidivistic law enforcement contact is a useful index of the effectiveness of diversion, although the groups might be expected to differ in severity of recidivistic offenses. A third group consists of those youths who have not violated the law, but who are referred for counseling because someone feels they have a need for help. For these youth, law enforcement recidivism is not an appropriate index, since they are not necessarily expected to ever have contact with law enforcement. A number of supplementary measures are needed, such as school grades and behavior, ratings by counselors, parents, and the clients themselves. Thus, the set of outcome measures used to assess impact of diversion services differs according to the nature of the cases.

In sum, we have found that we have had to use a tremendous variety of data. We have had to strike a balance between collecting all the data we would like and collecting only the most basic information. Another balance we have tried to maintain is with the people who are the consumers of our evaluation effort. On the one hand, we have developed a close working

relationship while on the other we have been careful to protect our independence and our objectivity. In the spirit of balancing viewpoints, we will now turn the program over to some of the people who are involved in running diversion programs, and so are among the 'consumers' of our evaluation research.